

Thomas D'Arcy McGee

as an

Empire Builder.



An Address

delivered by

J. K. FORAN, Lit. D., LL.B.

Secretary to Law Branch, House of Commons.

before the

Empire Club of Canada

At Toronto, on Thursday, February 8th, 1906.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

In presenting the following address, in pamphlet form, to the public, I am simply complying with the wishes of a great many persons deeply interested in the subject. I, however, will take advantage of the occasion to give expression to my keen appreciation of the kindness and hospitality with which I was received by the officers and members of the Empire Club of Canada. I am not vain enough to imagine that so much sympathetic sentiment was awakened by my humble effort to do justice to a great and departed fellow-countryman; rather was it the name of McGee that wove the spell. While it would be difficult to individualize, still I feel it a duty to publicly express my gratitude to Rev. William Clark, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D., the learned and patriotic President of the Empire Club of Canada; to Lieut.-Col. James Mason, the open-hearted and energetic founder and former President of that organization; and to J. Castell Hopkins, Esq., F.S.S., the talented author and gifted Literary Secretary of that important body. While memory lasts the occasion of my visit to Toronto, as a guest of the Empire Club of Canada, and the attention accorded me by the gentlemen I have named, will dwell as a happy and cherished recollection in the mind of their appreciative well-wisher

J. K. FORAN.

Ottawa, 15th February, 1906.

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE AS AN EMPIRE BUILDER.

Address Delivered by Dr. J. K. Foran, Before the Empire Club of
Canada, at Toronto, February 8th, 1906.

Rev. William Clark, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D., Principal of Trinity College and President of the Empire Club of Canada, occupied the chair on the occasion of the luncheon on February 8th, 1906. At the head of the table sat the guest and speaker of the day; Lieut.-Col. Mason, former President; J. Castell Hopkins, Esq., F.S.S., the Literary Secretary, and a number of the officers of the Club. Dr. Foran was introduced by the Chairman and was received in a most cordial manner. As the address proceeded a marked sympathetic feeling was manifested and, at the close, the hearty applause accorded the speaker told more eloquently than words how thoroughly he had won the approval of all present. Every seat at the long tables was occupied, and the attendance was the largest of the season.

On rising Dr. Foran spoke as follows:—

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—

It is needless to detain you with any lengthy expression of my deep appreciation of the honor conferred upon me in being thus permitted to address the Empire Club of Canada. The name of your association and the patriotic spirit which animates its officers and members would suggest a subject in accord with the splendid ideals that your principles represent, but time and the limited acquirements of the speaker make a less ambitious effort more obviously necessary on this occasion.

When a mountain torrent is stayed in its descent by an obstacle, the waters fret and toss in their curbed unrest, but when the impediment is removed they flow on even brighter, swifter and with more power than ever. So it is with me this afternoon, if, with my inexpressive phrase, I stop for a few moments the flow of your festive enjoyment, it is merely in order that in removing myself as the obstruction, it may go on the stronger, and the brighter than before.

POET, ORATOR, HISTORIAN.

“Thomas D'Arcy McGee as an Empire Builder,” is the subject I have selected for this brief address. It might possibly be made more entertaining were I to speak of that many-sided child of genius as the historian of his native land, for nothing could be more interesting than a detailed account of all his conscientious

researches and his unflagging zeal in the perfecting of his greatest historical achievement;—those were days of great exertion and of labor, when men had neither stenographers nor typewriters, nor any of the aids that we enjoy, when the pen had to trace every line of composition and the lively imagination and quickly conceived ideas had to be curbed and bridled while the mechanical task of transcription was being accomplished. It might also be made more brilliant and enthusiastic were I to speak of him as a poet and to quote from his splendid volume of historical, patriotic, sentimental and Canadian poems—a veritable casket of glittering gems, each one of priceless value in the storehouse of English literature. Again, it might be more attractive and powerful were I to dwell upon McGee as an orator, and, giving samples of his logical, polished and eloquent lectures and speeches, show how in a transcendent degree he possessed the sublime gift of silver speech. But all these phases of his personality are, in a way, merely accidents in the great purpose of his well-filled career. They are the sparkling ripples that add picturesqueness and beauty to the stream of his life; beneath them, broad, deep, and powerful, flows on the great current of his almost prophetic statesmanship; and it is to this seer-like gift that he owes the deserved title of an Empire Builder.

RAISING THE CURTAIN.

I simply seek this afternoon to raise a corner of the curtain that has long hung between the eyes of the great public and the secret of McGee's wonderful career of less than forty years, and to afford to the men of our day a glimpse of the real principles that actuated him, in common with other gifted souls of the same nationality and of the same school, in the work they had set so determinedly before them.

Misjudged by some, misunderstood by others, McGee at one time was the victim of prejudices as unreasonable as they were blind, and at another period he was the victim of a blindness that was as irrational as it was prejudiced. The better to appreciate his career and the presence of the same all-embracing principle that accompanied him through all its vicissitudes—it is necessary to divide his life into two parts: his early years in Ireland and America, then his closing years in Canada. And that we may see how McGee was no exception among the men of his generation and of his country, I will have to ask you to come for a few moments, in spirit, to the early "forties" of the nineteenth century, and to glance at the remarkable lives and still more remarkable

aims, of some of his associates—the men with whom he studied and labored at the dawn of his strangely varied career.

THE FOUNDERS OF "THE NATION."

It was in 1842 that three young men—Davis, Dillon and Duffy—sat down in the Phoenix Park, in Dublin, and there, studying the unfortunate condition of their country, decided to establish a paper that would infuse a new and more life-inspiring spirit into the Irish people. They saw the absolute need of higher and broader education, and the motto of the new organ was "Educate that you may be free." The success of "The Nation" was immediate, it was phenomenal. These men and the host of writers who sprang into existence, with poems, essays and works of deep thought, as prolific as flowers on a river bank in summer, devoted themselves to the study of political economy, of the science of government, and especially of the British Constitution. The sudden death of Davis, the prophet and guide of the party, in 1845, brought their grand schemes almost to ruin. The blow was severe in the extreme. To add to their misfortunes fresh batches of coercion acts were launched, which only seemed to goad the people, whom they sought to divert into an opposite pathway. Then came the famine of 1847. It would seem as if the very elements had conspired with the prejudiced section of humanity to frustrate their noble designs. "From the winter of 1846 to the summer of 1848 the wing of an avenging angel swept their sky and soil; the fruits died as the shadow passed, and men who had nurtured them into life saw in the withered leaves that they too must die," or else leave their homes and betake themselves to exile.

DUFFY IN AUSTRALIA.

McGee was at this time an American editor; he had fled from Ireland in the dark hour, and already was he deeply occupied with the study of the American system, its constitution and its principles. In Ireland an insurrection had broken out, led by William Smith O'Brien, and that gifted and noble student of political science has left a monumental work, his "Principles of Government," as an evidence of his deep appreciation of British institutions and his honest sorrow that they could not be extended, in all their perfection of freedom, to his own country.

"The Nation" was seized. Duffy was arrested, accused of treason-felony and tried in Dublin. By some technicality he escaped the utmost penalty. With all his brightest hopes and aspirations shattered, he left his native land and made his way to

Australia. But he took with him into that distant colony the same principles that actuated him at home. There he found a congenial soil whereon to sow that seed; soon he began to ascend the ladder of power. Finally he reached the post of Prime-ministership, and then he brought all his past experience and all his mature energy to bear in an effort to combine the Australian colonies in one great Commonwealth for their own protection and for the stability of the Empire. He laid the foundation of the Confederation that is to-day a reality in that section of the world. And the same grand principle animated him and the same ideal beckoned him on—whether he stood an accused rebel in the Dublin dock, or he bent his knee as the hand of the most queenly woman—Victoria—who had ever wielded the sceptre of royalty, placed the sword of Imperial authority on his shoulder, and for the services he had rendered the Empire, commanded him to arise “Sir Charles Gavin Duffy.”

PRINCIPLES OF THE LEADERS.

The principles imbibed by Dillon, O'Brien, Duffy and their associates, animated Thomas D'Arcy McGee, both in Ireland and in Canada. The grand idea of solidifying the British Empire by transforming Ireland—from a mill-stone around its neck to a key-stone in its arch of greatness—permeated the lives of these men. McGee, I repeat, was no exception, he was of the same school, and with gifts far more numerous and more brilliant than his contemporaries, he never found play for his talents, nor opportunity for his aims, nor a shrine wherein to set up his ideal, until he came to Canada. Once here, all his deep study of the British constitution, in theory, became illumined by contact with it in practice, and at once he bent all his energies in the direction of raising Canada to her rightful position and making her the polished buckle in the belt of Empire engirdling the world.

“THE FUTURE OF CANADA.”

It was in 1863, just at the outbreak of the American conflict, that McGee delivered—here in Toronto—a remarkable lecture on “The Future of Canada.” His own words will illustrate better than could any language of mine the character of his aspirations and the magnificent plans for the upbuilding of the Empire, through the medium of this grand colony, that he had conceived: and I may add that he never lost sight of his Irish hopes and aims, pinness, under the unrestricted freedom afforded by the constitution, would become a most powerful factor—an irresistible one—in obtaining like liberty and like autonomy for the land of his

birth. On that occasion Mr. McGee said: "It may be said that it is rather strange for an Irishman that spent his youth in resisting that government in his native country to be found among the admirers of British constitutional government in Canada. To that this is my reply—if in my day Ireland had been governed as Canada is governed, I would have been as sound a constitutional conservative as is to be found in that land. But, although I was not born and bred in the best school to see the merits of the British constitutional system, I trust I am not going to quarrel with the sun and the elements because of late it has ruined 200 out of 365 days on that particular spot of earth on which I was born. I take the British constitutional system as the great original system on which are founded the institutions of all free states . . . I take it as combining in itself permanency and liberty—liberty which is enjoyed in practice by all the people of Canada, of every origin and creed."

A CONSTITUTIONAL STRUGGLE.

The liberties which we now enjoy in Canada, and which McGee so highly appreciated, were won by the men of 1837-38, who rose up against the violation of the spirit of that liberty-imparting constitution. Success attended their efforts in Canada—hence the loyalty of the French-Canadian people of to-day. In Ireland the struggle was of a like character, but failure left the country in the same position as it had been for generations.

TWO GREAT LANDMARKS.

Standing upon the hilltop and gazing out upon the future Dominion, his eagle-eye taking in every detail of the scene to the horizon's uttermost rim, the prophetic statesman then exclaimed: "Though theoretical to-day, our future will be practical to-morrow. I never posed as a preacher of loyalty; I preach security, I preach precaution, I preach self-preservation." Then pointing out that the Governments of the Old World were then nearly all monarchies, while those of the New World were principally republics, he began a deep analysis of the two systems, and a selection of that most adopted to the present and future needs of Canada.

"Some monarchies," he said, "in all but name might be considered republics, while some republics partake largely, if not of monarchical, certainly of an oligarchical character. We can only appeal to two teachers—contemporary events and the voice of history." Let me quote another passage and then we will come to the irrefutable logic of McGee's political reasoning:

“British precedent and American examples,” he said, “are the landmarks for us; by and beyond them we must go, but it is still within our power to say on which shore we shall sacrifice, and under what auspices we shall elect to prosecute our destined course. The American example has, for me, the fatal defect of instability and inconstancy.” Be it remembered that McGee was then fresh from a lengthy and close study of the American constitutional system in all its phases, and that he was speaking in Canada while the first shots of the great struggle between the North and South resounded across the line. “As to the other original of a free state,” he said, “the British Constitution, it will at least be allowed, even by its enemies, the merit of stability. As it exists to-day it has existed for 800—for 1,000 years. Here, then, is a form of government that has lasted, with modifications to suit the spirit of the age, for a period of 800 years, and here is another that has lasted 80 years; one has a career of eight centuries, and the other a life of two and a half generations. In this country there are no ancient ruins, no time honored relics of antiquity—mementos and grand indicators of the past—to influence the minds of the people, give tone to their morals and their manners, and remind them that they have something to preserve—here, therefore, do we need an olden, a time-defying, a liberty imparting constitution, that has been in process of preparation for us through all the changes and improvements of the centuries that are gone.”

THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

Were I to quote further it might be said that my entire address consisted of McGee's great lecture; these passages suffice to indicate the trend of his ideas and the solidity of the principles that fashioned his course. If you look closely into it you will find that the British constitutional system is a powerful unity composed of reciprocally necessary parts that form a trinity of powers. Tyranny is rendered practically impossible by the fact that all legislation must either emanate from the people through their duly elected representatives in the Commons, or be concurred in by them. Anarchy and revolutionary tendencies are held in check by the necessary passage of that legislation through the crucible of the House of Lords—exponents and representatives of vested rights. And all danger to the social edifice is obviated by the veto power of the monarch, who is the highest and final tribunal and whose power is consecrated in the olden legend that “the King can do no wrong.” Thus the monarch cannot impose a law on the people that the latter section of that trinity has not accepted and even originated, while the masses cannot undermine constitutional authority, nor shake the fabric of the state without

the co-operation of both the representatives of the classes and of the sovereign of the realm. Thus evenly balanced that constitutional system is perfectly adapted to a free people and especially to a young nationhood such as that of the Canadian Dominion.

McGee saw that legislative freedom guaranteed by the constitution, "broadening down from precedent to precedent" through all the vicissitudes of eight centuries, and, with his seer-like gift, he beheld it as the principal element in the accomplishment of that great millenium of peace and happiness foretold by the immortal laureate :

"When the war-drums beat no more,
And the battle-flags are furl'd,
In the Parliament of man,
The Federation of the world."

THE CONFEDERATION IDEA.

To attain that grand and general federation McGee saw that it was necessary to solidify the world-engirdling Empire of Britain, to have each section of that Empire contribute to the construction and permanent stability of the whole edifice, it was necessary to confederate the various provinces in one great bond of political wedlock, in the premier colony—the colony destined in the order of things, to become the store-house of the civilized world. And he saw in the Confederation of this Dominion the assurance of untold progress and prosperity, of boundless freedom and happiness, and in that grand consummation he beheld the most powerful example and most irrefutable argument that men of the coming generation could present, when asking for Ireland like political liberty and like legislative autonomy. Thus his principles in Canada were in perfect harmony with his aims in Ireland, and his attitude in Ireland (like that of Duffy) merely pointed towards the same ideal that loomed so grandly before him when he devoted his talents and energies to the cause of British constitutional greatness in this young country.

McGEE'S TRAGIC END.

In his early years his motives were misunderstood by the political opponents of his country's cause, and as the victim of that misunderstanding he was driven into exile. In his later years his aims were misjudged by men who had not his keen vision and he fell the victim of his own great honesty of purpose and perhaps a too frank expression of opinions, that time has fully

justified, but which were beyond the capacities and comprehensive powers of certain men of his own day.

I am not going to rehearse the tragic story of his untimely end. Scarcely had the echo of his last eloquent plea for confederation, for harmony, for tolerance, died away amidst the Gothic niches of the new Parliament house at Ottawa on the—sadly memorable—morning of April the 7th, 1868, than the calm of a glorious night, disturbed only by the roar of the distant Chaudiere, was broken by a sharper and more deadly report, and the great, good heart of the gifted statesman had ceased forever to beat, the magic tongue of the noble orator was silent for all time, and the patriot soul of Thomas D'Arcy McGee stood, amidst a more awful silence, in the scintillating glory of God's presence.

HIS PROPHETIC VISIONS.

"It is not Death alone, but Time and Death, that canonize the patriot," said Duffy in speaking of Thomas Davis. Well might we apply the same truthful expression to Thomas D'Arcy McGee. We are yet too near to see his proportions truly. When all the great designs he had conceived shall be brought to accomplishment, when his wonderful visions concerning Canada's future shall be realized—and many of them have already been fulfilled—the future historian will be in a position to assign him the deserved place he must occupy in the Valhalla of Canadian statesmanship. Until then we must be content with gleaning from the fragments of his works—his poems, lectures, speeches, essays, histories—whatever idea of a truly great man can be derived from books and the products of a fertile and well-balanced brain.

However, we can draw for our guidance and for the benefit of the future citizens of Canada, lessons of tolerance and patriotism from his precepts and his practice. In 1866 he predicted that before the 20th century would have run the quarter of its course this country would have a population of twenty millions, that the vast plains beyond the Great Lakes would be the granery of the world, and that the whistle of the steam-engine, heard on the sea-board at Halifax, would scare the eagles from their nests in the Rockies. Forty years have gone past, the twentieth century has yet two decades to run before it reaches the quarter of its course, and already—save as to the population—those predictions have been fulfilled. And every national indication now points to the entire fulfilment before 1925. Then we may have three, four, yes five, transcontinental lines of railway, while today all the greatest achievements of the navigators and the travellers of past centuries are cast into insignificance by a single Canadian com-

pany (the C.P.R.) sending the son of its president completely around the world, without once leaving, either by land or by sea, the line of that all-British-Canadian company.

HIS SPLENDID TOLERATION.

McGee wished to have buried in the waves of Atlantic all the prejudices and animosities of the Old World and to see the different races in Canada, even as streams blend in the sea, commingle in the great ocean of a truly Canadian nationhood. He preached tolerance and broad-minded sympathy for those who might differ from us religiously or otherwise. He wished to see all enmities up-rooted, and for all time. Thomas Francis Meagher tells of a splendid oak that he beheld on the banks of the Missouri. Its trunk was heavy with the rings of age, its branches extensive, its leaves variegated with the hues of autumn; but the roots that peeped out from the bank, were white and glistening, like the bones of a dead caravan in the desert. The waters had gradually eaten away the clay that held the monarch of the forest erect; and soon a spring tide would come to sweep away the remainder of that earth; then the tree would fall into the stream, its branches be broken, and it would be swept on, from rock to rock, until, some fifty miles below, it would be cast upon some dull swamp to perish and be forgotten.

Such seems to me the fate of intolerance in this land. It may seem powerful to-day; its branches may be extensive; its leaves may be tinged with the hues of prejudices. But the roots are black and bare; the stream of constitutional freedom rolls on and eats away the earth that holds it erect. A spring tide will come, and the last remnant of that clay will be swept away. Then the tree of religious rancor will fall into the stream of Time, be carried on from rapid to rapid, until, fifty years or so further down, it will be cast a shapeless mass, to perish for all time on the dull swamp of human oblivion.

DUFFY'S STRONG TESTIMONY.

Sir Charles Gavin Duffy, in his "Young Ireland—1840 to 1850," says of McGee "In Canada he became the leader of the Irish immigrants, a great parliamentary orator, and one of the founders of the new Dominion. As the Minister of a free state, he developed unexpected powers and was universally recognized as a gifted and original statesman. Success did not wean him from his early labors. While he was a Canadian politician he produced a careful and sympathetic history of Ireland, and con-

stantly wrote verses as racy of the Irish soil as when he was a contributor to *The Nation*." Then Duffy adds: "His resistance to a Fenian invasion of a country where Irishmen were generously received and fairly treated, was not an offence, but a merit. There was no leading member of the party from Davis to Meagher, who would not have done the same. No man ever had distinguished services more grudgingly admitted.* He had gifts which placed him on a level with the best of his associates, and for years he applied them exclusively to the service of Ireland. As a poet he was not second to Davis, as an orator he possessed powers rarer and higher than Meagher's—persuasion, imagination, humor and spontaneity."

A CLOSING INVOCATION.

I may not be able, like McGee, to cast the horoscope of the future with the certainty of almost prenatal inspiration; but I can look up in confidence to the Providence that rules the destinies of nations, that reaches from end to end, that flashes in the lightning and speaks in the mighty volumes of the thunder, that whets the sword of justice, nerves the patriot's arm and guides the prophet's pen; I can ask that Providence to look down upon our fair Dominion, to inspire her rulers with wisdom and patriotism, that they may conduct her along the highway of progress, peace and glory. And when the day comes that McGee's prophetic utterance shall find a complete fulfilment and Canada shall take her rank, on a footing of equality, amongst the nations of earth—the fairest jewel in this diadem of Empire—I would ask Him to raise up a poet-historian, a great lyrist in the land, cleanse his lips as He did those of Isaias, fill his bosom with inspirations like unto those that thrilled in the breast of the Royal Prophet, give him the vigor of Ossian, the melody of Moore, and the harmonic culture of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, that while he is praising the "Giver of all good gifts," he may worthily chant a deathless anthem of gratitude for the boundless privileges, the freedom, prosperity, contentment and happiness enjoyed by the citizens of this fair land under the glorious safeguards of our matchless constitution.

*The same fatuity seems to have attended McGee after his death. In all the principal works, biographical and historical, published, and in all the public addresses delivered, on the subject of Confederation, not once do we find McGee's name mentioned.

